



कठोपनिषत्
Katopanishad
Section 1
Volume 2

पीतोदकाः जग्धतृणाः दुग्धदोहाः निरिन्द्रियाः । अनन्दा नाम ते लोकाः तान् स गच्छति ता ददत् ॥	1 - 3
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This is the story thus far. वाजश्रवस was performing an elaborate Vedic Havan Ritual called विश्वजित् यज्ञ, seeking heavenly enjoyments in his present and future lives. His son Nachiketa, still a young boy, filled with great श्रद्धा in the proper performance of the यज्ञ and the consequent fulfillment of his father's wishes, was watching the proceedings of the यज्ञ attentively. As his father was in the process of distributing cows to the priests and the assembled ब्राह्मणाs as दक्षिणाs- as gifts in appreciation of their services, seeing the quality of those cows, Nachiketa thought within himself as follows:

स : अमन्यत -The Upanishad now tells what his thoughts were.

पीतोदकाः जग्धतृणाः दुग्धदोहाः निरिन्द्रियाः । अनन्दा नाम ते लोकाः तान् स गच्छति ता ददत् ॥	1 - 3
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Directing his mind towards the different grades of cows being presented as दक्षिणाs - as gifts to the ब्राह्मणाs, Nachiketa sees some of these cows as

पीतोदका : - पीत उदकाः - उदकं means water



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पीतं means, has been drunk already. Therefore,

पीतोदकाः means, these cows have already drunk their last drops of water, which means that these cows are so old that they cannot even drink water any more. Further, he sees some cows as

जग्धतृणाः - तृण - grass, जग्ध has been eaten. Therefore जग्धतृणाः means, these cows, may be, they can drink water, but they cannot eat grass, because they have no teeth. Again, he sees some other cows as

दुग्धदोहाः - दोह milk, दुग्ध has already been milked. Therefore दुग्धदोहाः means that these cows whose milk has already been milked for the last time, which means, that these cows - maybe they can drink water and eat grass, but they can no longer yield any milk.

These ब्रह्मणाः are obliged to feed them, but they can get no milk from them, because these cows have passed the age of yielding milk. Again, he sees some other cows as

निरिन्द्रियाः - These are cows which are devoid of the power of their organs, which means they are no longer capable of bearing calves.

In other words, all the cows that he is seeing are too old to be useful and they are unfit to be given as दक्षिणाः for the ब्राह्मणाः. Therefore Nachiketa thinks this way.

ददत् ताः - Giving these kinds of cows as दक्षिणाः for the ब्राह्मणाः

सः तान् गच्छति - he, the performer of the यज्ञ कर्म, goes to those worlds

अनन्दा नाम ते लोकाः - which are called the joyless worlds, totally devoid of all happiness.

"Giving cows which can no longer drink water, no longer eat grass, no longer give milk, no longer bear calves, giving such cows as दक्षिणाः as gifts for the ब्राह्मणाः, the performer of such a यज्ञ कर्म goes only to the joyless world of experiences, totally devoid of all happiness" so thinks Nachiketa.

Evidently, in Nachiketa's vision, his father was doing something wrong, something improper. His father was not fulfilling properly the requirements of the यज्ञ कर्म which he had voluntarily undertaken. By the rules of this यज्ञ कर्म, he was required to give away all that he possessed. What he was actually giving away were only old and useless cows. Such giving is the path, not to the joyful world of heavenly experiences that he is seeking, but only to joyless world of hellish experiences.

Being so much committed in his mind to the letter and spirit of the वेद मन्त्रः, associated with the यज्ञ कर्म as ईश्वर आदेश - as the very command words of परमेश्वर, Nachiketa



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could not reconcile himself to the possibility of such a terrible fate for his father. Therefore, in order to make up for the perceived deficiency in the proper performance of his father's यज्ञ कर्म, Nachiketa takes this bold step. He goes to his father and says:

स होवाच पितरं तत कस्मै मां दास्यसि इति ।

द्वितीयं तृतीयं तँ होवाच मृत्यवे त्वा ददामि इति ॥

1 - 4

Even while his father was busy in the rituals involved in giving away the cows to the ब्राह्मणाs, Nachiketa approached his father

सः पितरं उवाच ह - he said to his father. Again, the word ह here indicates that the Upanishad's narration of the story here is just as it happened.

तत - meaning तात Addressing his father as तात, which is the affectionate and respectful way to address one's father.

तात, कस्मै मां दास्यसि इति - to whom, to which ब्राह्मण will you give me as दक्षिण ?

The father seemed to be too busy to pay any attention to his question. Therefore,

द्वितीयं तृतीयं ह उवाच - To whom will you give me as दक्षिण ? to whom will you give me as दक्षिण ?" Thus he persisted in asking the same question again for the second time, and again for the third time.

The father lost his temper at what he considered to be an ill-mannered intrusion of his young son during the progress of the यज्ञ कर्म, and he exploded thus in anger.

मृत्यवे त्वा (त्वां) ददामि इति - "Unto मृत्यु - Lord Death, Lord यम (Yama) I give you"

तँ ह उवाच - तँ ह उवाच means, thus the father replied to Nachiketa. The ँकार used for Nachiketa (तँ) indicates the God-conscious mental environment of Nachiketa, at the time his father uttered the words "मृत्यवे त्वा ददामि - I give you to Lord Yama". By so saying at the यज्ञ कर्म, Nachiketa's father has already given away Nachiketa to Lord यम.

Even as he was doing that, Nachiketa's father found himself in a mood of anger and fear, anger over himself for momentarily losing control over himself, and fear of the possible consequences of his unintended action. But Nachiketa himself had no fear or



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anger. He was, as before, filled with श्रद्धा in the proper performance of the यज्ञ कर्म, as ईश्वर कर्म, ईश्वर आदेश - as the very command of परमेश्वर.

That is the significance of the ँकार शब्द (तँ ह उवाच) with reference to Nachiketa.

When Nachiketa asked his father "कस्मै मां दास्यसि - to whom will you give me", Nachiketa seemed to remind his father that he was required to give away all his possessions, and that he, as his son, was also meant to be given away, and so he wanted to know to whom his father proposed to give him - which only revealed Nachiketa's innate virtue of श्रद्धा. He had great love for the sanctity of वेद मन्त्रs - propriety in the performance of the यज्ञ कर्म s as ईश्वर कर्म. The father ignored the son's question initially, but the son pressed home his question a second and a third time. Then the father momentarily lost his temper, at what he considered to be an improper intrusion of his son, and hence exploded in anger " मृत्यवे त्वा ददामि - Unto मृत्यु, unto Lord यम (Yama) - Unto The Lord of Death I give you."

Hearing the angry words of his father, Nachiketa was not perturbed. He was ready to go anywhere and do anything in the interests of the proper performance of the यज्ञ कर्म, for the absolute good of his father. Now, having already been given to Lord यम, Nachiketa was getting ready in his mind for his next step, and thought within himself as follows:

बहूनां एमि प्रथमो बहूनां एमि मध्यमः ।

किं स्वित् यमस्य कर्तव्यं यन्मया अद्य करिष्यति ॥

1 - 5

Having been told by his father "मृत्यवे त्वा ददामि - Unto Lord यम I give you", Nachiketa recognized that his father was upset by his behaviour. Therefore, he retired to a quiet place, away from his father, and began to think deeply about what was for him to do next.

He thinks as follows: "I will go to Lord यम and be of service to him as well as I can. What can a ब्राह्मण boy like me do for an exalted person like Lord यम? I don't know. I will regard him as my गुरु, and serve him as well as I can, as a शिष्य - a disciple, just as I have been serving my father. That is all I know"



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In Vedic culture, one regards the teacher just as one regards one's father. In one's service to the teacher or one's father, there are three levels of conduct. प्रथमः, मध्यमः, and अधमः - the foremost, the middle and the lowest.

The foremost conduct is to be of service to the teacher by ascertaining his wishes at the proper time. The middle level conduct is to do exactly what one is asked to do, and the lowest level of conduct is to disobey the teacher. Nachiketa thinks this is how he will conduct himself, as a disciple for Lord यम.

बहूनां एमि प्रथमः - Among the many disciplines

एमि - I go

प्रथमः (सन्) - being the first among them, which means, among his many disciples, I will be the first to be of service to him, and I will try to be the best in my service to him by ascertaining his wishes at the proper time. Occasionally, if I cannot be the best in my service to him,

बहूनां एमि मध्यमः - among the many disciples, I will at least try to be in the middle rank in my service, doing as well as I can, what I am asked to do.

But I will never be the अधमः - the worst in my service. I will never disobey Lord यम. I will try to be useful to him at all times.

But then, Nachiketa thinks further.

किं स्वित्, यमस्य कर्तव्यं, मया अद्य करिष्यति

किं यमस्य कर्तव्यं - What work of यम is there

यत् मया अद्य करिष्यति - that which is going to be accomplished through me, today, meaning, through the action of my father in giving me to यम today. Therefore,

किं यमस्य कर्तव्यं, यत् मया अद्य करिष्यति - What work of यम is there which is going to be accomplished through me, by the action of my father in giving me to यम today? In other words, of what use am I going to be for यम? Obviously, Nachiketa thinks that no significant work of यम is going to be accomplished through his services, which means his own services to यम, however well done, is probably going to be insignificant.

Actually, it is not going to be insignificant, as Nachiketa seems to think. It is going to be Great and Auspicious, as the Upanishad words expressing the thoughts of Nachiketa at this time indicate. Let us reflect on the actual Upanishad words here.



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किं स्वित्, यमस्य कर्तव्यं, यत् मया अद्य करिष्यति - In the expression किं यमस्य कर्तव्यं - meaning "What work of यम " the Upanishad adds two attributes to the word, किं which means what? The Upanishad says किं स्वित् - the word स्वित् simply accentuates the meaning of the word किं. It makes the word किं the most prominent in the expression. Therefore, किं स्वित् यमस्य कर्तव्यं means What a great work of यम !

As an additional attribute, *कार शब्द is added to किं स्वित्. Therefore

किं स्वित् यमस्य कर्तव्यं means, what a great work of यम - whatever that work is, It is a manifestation of the very grace of परमेश्वर. Therefore

किं स्वित् यमस्य कर्तव्यं, यत् मया अद्य करिष्यति means, what a great work of यम which is going to be accomplished through me, by the action of my father, in giving me to यम today. That great work of यम, whatever that is, is indeed the very grace of परमेश्वर.

Such is the meaning of the divinely inspired thought of नचिकेता, by virtue of his श्रद्धा. The work of यम that is going to be accomplished through Nachiketa, by the action of his father today, is indeed great and auspicious. What ultimately comes out of today's event is the perennial flow of ब्रह्म विद्या in the form of कठोपनिषत्, which is going to uplift countless generations of people for thousands of years to come, and Nachiketa is the all important link in this flow of ब्रह्म विद्या knowledge. The very fact that we are reading कठोपनिषत् today is a manifestation of the glory of this event in Nachiketa's life, and also the glory of this event in our own lives today.

Before we leave this verse, let us understand today's event properly. The perception of the young boy Nachiketa at a particular time in the यज्ञ कर्म should not leave us with the impression that Nachiketa's father was miserly, that he kept the good cows for himself and gave only the old and useless cows to the ब्राह्मणस as gifts. Certainly, the Upanishad does not say so. On the other hand, even in the very opening verse, verse 1, the Upanishad said:

वाजश्रवसः सर्वं वेदसं ददौ वाजश्रवस - Nachiketa's father gave away all his possessions, all his wealth as gifts. Therefore, there is absolutely no justification to attribute any ill-motive to Nachiketa's father at the यज्ञ कर्म. Consequently, the events



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that happened at the यज्ञ कर्म leading to the statement "मृत्यवे त्वा ददामि" by Nachiketa's father, thus giving Nachiketa to Lord यम, is also a manifestation of the very grace of परमेश्वर for the welfare of humanity. With this understanding, let us now proceed with the Upanishad.

As Nachiketa was thinking, as said in the last verse, Nachiketa's father was also thinking about what he said, and he sincerely repented his rash utterance spoken in a moment of anger. Of course he did not mean to give away his beloved young son to Lord Death. Since words spoken in a fit of anger need not have to be considered as commitments, he desired to withdraw those words.

There are Vedic rituals available for repentance and withdrawal of angry words. But Nachiketa did not want his father to withdraw his own words. He felt this way "Let my father's words not become false, even though I may not be of any significant use to Lord यम, let me at least make sure that my father's words can never be in vain" so was his thinking.

Thus Nachiketa had made up his mind to go to Lord यम, being truthful to the words of his father. But his father was not ready to let him go to Lord यम. In order to persuade his father to live up to his words and let him go to Lord यम, Nachiketa tells his father:

अनुपश्य यथा पूर्वं प्रतिपश्य तथाऽपरे ।
सस्यमिव मर्त्यः पच्यते सस्यमिव अजायते पुनः ॥ 1 - 6

Addressing his father, Nachiketa says, Father

अनुपश्य यथा पूर्वं

अनुपश्य means अनुक्रमेण आलोचय. Please think about this matter properly in proper sequence, in proper order, namely

पूर्वं - अतिक्रान्ताः पितृ पितामहादयः तव - your forefathers gone before, your father, your grandfather, your great grandfather, etc.

Carefully recall in your mind every one of them about whom you have heard. Was there any one among them who said something and did not live up to those words? We come from such a family. Living up to the truth of one's word is our family code of conduct. Having said something, what is said is said. There can be no going back on what has been said, whatever might follow. That is our कुल धर्म - family tradition. Therefore, it is



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both natural and proper for you to follow the foot steps of our by-gone forefathers. You stand to gain by such conduct in your own life. Further,

प्रतिपश्य तथा अपरे - Likewise, observe and reflect on the lives of other respected people who are living now, around us, in our own society. In their lives also, there never was, and there never is, any falsification of one's own words.

In all these people, those who have gone by in our family, and also those who are respectable in our own present day society, well, in all of them, there is, and there never was, any falsification of one's own words. Falsifying one's own words is only for people who are not well-brought up in **सनातन धर्म**. By falsifying one's own words, by telling lies, nobody becomes above old age and death. By being truthful at all times, at least one goes to heaven. Therefore, what is the use of falsifying one's own words? Again consider this fact.

सस्यं इव मर्त्यः पच्यते

सस्यं इव - Like corn (corn here stands for all plants grown from seeds)

मर्त्यः मरण योग्यः - one is subject to death – a **मनुष्य**, a human being, every human being

पच्यते, जीर्णः सन् म्रियते - gets old and finally dies like a corn plant. Similarly

सस्यं इव अजायते पुनः

सस्यं इव - like the corn plant

अजायते पुनः - he is born again

That being so, what does one gain in this transient world of human beings, by falsifying one's own words. It is better that I go to Lord **यम** upholding your words, thereby I will make your words true, even though they were told in a moment of anger. Please protect yourself, Please uphold your commitment to truth at all times. Please never falsify your own words. Please let me go to Lord **यम** ".

That is the content of Nachiketa's words to his father. Having heard the words of wisdom from his son, and on his own further reflection, Nachiketa's father finally decided to honour his own words. Accordingly, he sent his young son Nachiketa to Lord **यम**. Then what happened, we will see next time.